

### Artificial Software Diversification for WebAssembly

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Doctoral Thesis
Supervised by
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Tryck: Universitetsservice US AB

#### Abstract

[1]

Keywords: Lorem, Ipsum, Dolor, Sit, Amet

#### Sammanfattning

[1]

#### 1. Superoptimization of WebAssembly Bytecode

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Shrinish Donde, Jian Gu, Orestis Floros, Lucas Satabin, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus

Conference Companion of the 4th International Conference on Art, Science, and Engineering of Programming (Programming 2021), MoreVMs https://doi.org/10.1145/3397537.3397567

#### 2. CROW: Code Diversification for WebAssembly

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Orestis Floros, Oscar Vera-Pérez, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus

https://doi.org/10.14722/madweb.2021.23004

#### 3. Multi-Variant Execution at the Edge

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Pierre Laperdrix, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry

Conference on Computer and Communications Security (CCS 2022), Moving Target Defense (MTD)

https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3560828.3564007

#### 4. WebAssembly Diversification for Malware Evasion

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Tim Toady, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry Computers & Security, Volume 131, 2023

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S01674048230 02067

### 5. Wasm-mutate: Fast and Effective Binary Diversification for WebAssembly

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Nick Fitzgerald, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry

#### 6. Scalable Comparison of JavaScript V8 Bytecode Traces

Javier Cabrera-Arteaga, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry

11th ACM SIGPLAN International Workshop on Virtual Machines and Intermediate Languages (SPLASH 2019)

https://doi.org/10.1145/3358504.3361228

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

#### ACRONYMS

List of commonly used acronyms:

Wasm WebAssembly

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### Part I

### Thesis

**TODO** Recent papers first. Mention Workshops instead in conference. "Proceedings of XXXX". Add the pages in the papers list.

#### ■ 1.1 Background

**TODO** Motivate with the open challenges.

#### ■ 1.2 Problem statement

**TODO** Problem statement TODO Set the requirements as R1, R2, then map each contribution to them.

#### ■ 1.3 Automatic Software diversification requirements

#### 1. 1: TODO Requirement 1

#### ■ 1.4 List of contributions

- C1: Methodology contribution: We propose a methodology for generating software diversification for WebAssembly and the assessment of the generated diversity.
- C2: Theoretical contribution: We propose theoretical foundation in order to improve Software Diversification for WebAssembly.
- C3: Automatic diversity generation for WebAssembly: We generate WebAssembly program variants.
- C4: Software Diversity for Defensive Purposes: We assess how generated WebAssembly program variants could be used for defensive purposes.
- C5: Software Diversity for Offensives Purposes: We assess how generated WebAssembly program variants could be used for offensive purposes, yet improving security systems.

Contribution	Resarch papers				
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
C1	X	X		X	X
C1 C2	x	X			
C3	x	X	X		
C4	x	X	X		
C5			X		
C6	X	X	$\mathbf{X}$	X	X

Table 1.1: Mapping of the contributions to the research papers appended to this thesis.

**C6**: Software Artifacts: We provide software artifacts for the research community to reproduce our results.

#### TODO Make multi column table

#### ■ 1.5 Summary of research papers

P1: Superoptimization of WebAssembly Bytecode.

P2: CROW: Code randomization for WebAssembly bytecode.

**P3**: Multivariant execution at the Edge.

P4: Wasm-mutate: Fast and efficient software diversification for WebAssembly.

P5: WebAssembly Diversification for Malware evasion.

#### ■ 1.6 Thesis outline

## 02

## BACKGROUND AND STATE OF THE ART

- 2.1 WebAssembly
- 2.1.1 WebAssembly toolchains

**TODO** Mention, stress the landscape of tools that involve Wasm. Include analysis tools, fuzzers, optimizers and malware detectors.

**TODO** End up motivating the need of Software Diversification for: testing and reliability.

- 2.2 Software diversification
- 2.3 Generating Software Diversification
- 2.3.1 Variants generation
- 2.3.2 Variants equivalence
- 2.4 Exploiting Software Diversification
- 2.4.1 Defensive Diversification
- 2.4.2 Offensive Diversification

## AUTOMATIC SOFTWARE DIVERSIFICATION FOR WEBASSEMBLY

WebAssembly programs are produced ahead of time through a process that begins with the source code and moves through the compiler, ultimately resulting in a WebAssembly program. Software Diversification can be achieved at any of these stages. Diversifying at the source code stage, however, is not practical due to the necessity of creating a distinct diversifier for each language compatible with WebAssembly. In contrast, focusing on the compiler stage presents a viable option, especially considering that 70% of WebAssembly binaries are created using LLVM-based compilers, as noted by Hilbig et al. [?]. Furthermore, implementing diversification at the WebAssembly program stage stands as the most generic strategy, applicable to any WebAssembly program in the wild. Therefore, this thesis focuses to the exploration of diversification strategies at the compiler and WebAssembly program stages, employing two main approaches: compiler-based and binary-based.

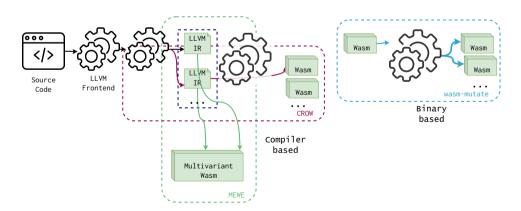


Figure 3.1: Approach landscape.

Our compiler-based strategies are depicted in red and green in Figure 3.1. This approach introduces a diversifier component in the LLVM pipeline, generating

LLVM IR variants and producing artificial software diversity for Wasm. This strategy encompasses two tools: CROW [?], which creates Wasm program variants, and MEWE [?], which merges these variants to foster multivariant execution for Wasm. In contrast, the binary-based strategy, illustrated in blue in Figure 3.1, offers diversification for any WebAssembly program. wasm-mutate [?] generates a pool of WebAssembly program variants through rewriting rules upon an e-graph [?] data structure, eliminating the need for compiler tuning. This dissertation contributes to the field of Software Diversification for WebAssembly, presenting three main technical contributions: CROW, MEWE, and wasm-mutate, which will be elaborated upon in the subsequent sections.

#### ■ 3.1 CROW: Code Randomization of WebAssembly

This section details CROW [?], represented as the red squared tooling in Figure 3.1. CROW is designed to produce semantically equivalent Wasm variants from the output of an LLVM front-end, utilizing a custom Wasm LLVM backend to craft Wasm binary variants.

Figure 3.2 illustrates CROW's workflow in generating program variants, a process compound of two core stages: exploration and combining. During the exploration stage, CROW processes every instruction within each function of the LLVM input, creating a set of functionally equivalent code variants. This process ensures a rich pool of options for the subsequent stage. In the combining stage, these alternatives are assembled to form diverse LLVM IR variants, a task achieved through the exhaustive traversal of the power set of all potential combinations of code replacements. The final step involves the custom Wasm LLVM backend, which compiles the crafted LLVM IR variants into Wasm binaries.

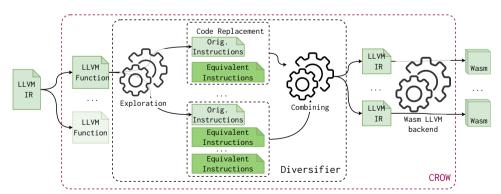


Figure 3.2: CROW components following the diagram in Figure 3.1. CROW takes LLVM IR to generate functionally equivalent code replacements. Then, CROW assembles program variants by combining them.

#### ■ 3.1.1 Variants' generation

The primary component of CROW's exploration process is its code replacements generation strategy. The diversifier implemented in CROW is based on the proposed superdiversifier of Jacob et al. [?]. A superoptimizer focuses on searching for a new program that is faster or smaller than the original code while preserving its functionality. The concept of superoptimizing a program dates back to 1987, with the seminal work of Massalin [?] which proposes an exhaustive exploration of the solution space. The search space is defined by choosing a subset of the machine's instruction set and generating combinations of optimized programs, sorted by code size in ascending order. If any of these programs is found to perform the same function as the source program, the search halts. On the contrary, a superdiversifier keeps all intermediate search results despite their performance.

We modify Souper [?] to keep all possible solutions in their searching algorithm. Souper builds a Data Flow Graph for each LLVM integer-returning instruction. Then, for each Data Flow Graph, Souper exhaustively builds all possible expressions from a subset of the LLVM IR language. Each syntactically correct expression in the search space is semantically checked versus the original with a theorem solver. Souper synthesizes the replacements in increasing size. Thus, the first found equivalent transformation is the optimal replacement result of the searching. CROW keeps more equivalent replacements during the searching by removing the halting criteria. Instead the original halting conditions, CROW does not halt when it finds the first replacement. CROW continues the search until a timeout is reached or the replacements grow to a size larger that a predefined threshold.

Notice that the searching space increases exponentially with the size of the LLVM IR language subset. Thus, we prevent Souper from synthesizing instructions with no correspondence in the Wasm backend. This decision reduces the searching space. For example, creating an expression having the freeze LLVM instructions will increase the searching space for instruction without a Wasm's opcode in the end. Moreover, we disable the majority of the pruning strategies of Souper for the sake of more program variants. For example, Souper prevents the generation of the commutative operations during the searching. On the contrary, CROW still uses such transformation as a strategy to generate program variants.

#### ■ 3.1.2 Constant inferring

One of the code transformation strategies of Souper does constant inferring. This means that Souper infers pieces of code as a single constant assignment. In particular, Souper focuses on variables that are used to control branches. After a constant inferring, the generated program is considerably different from the original program, being suitable for diversification. Let us illustrate the case

with an example. The Babbage problem code in Listing 3.1 is composed of a loop that stops when it discovers the smaller number that fits with the Babbage condition in Line 4.

Listing 3.1: Babbage problem.

In theory, this value can also be inferred

Listing 3.2: Constant inferring transformation over the original Babbage problem in Listing 3.1.

```
int babbage() {
   int current = 25264;

printf ("The number is %d\n", current);
   return 0;
}
```

by unrolling the loop the correct number of times with the LLVM toolchain. However, standard LLVM tools cannot unroll the while-loop because the loop count is too large. The original Souper deals with this case, generating the program in Listing 3.2. It infers the value of current in Line 2 such that the Babbage condition is reached. Therefore, the condition in the loop will always be false. Then, the loop is dead code and is removed in the final compilation. The new program in Listing 3.2 is remarkably smaller and faster than the original code. Therefore, it offers differences both statically and at runtime<sup>1</sup>.

During the implementation of CROW, we have the premise of removing all built-in optimizations in the LLVM backend that could reverse Wasm variants. Therefore, we modify the Wasm backend. We disable all optimizations in the Wasm backend that could reverse the CROW transformations. In the following enumeration, we list three concrete optimizations that we remove from the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Notice that for the sake of illustration, we show both codes in C language, this process inside CROW is performed directly in LLVM IR. Also, notice that the two programs in the example follow the definition of *functional equivalence* discussed in ??.

#### Wasm backend.<sup>2</sup>

- Constant folding: this optimization calculates the operation over two (or more) constants in compiling time, and replaces the original expression by its constant result. For example, let us suppose a=10+12 a subexpression to be compiled, with the original optimization, the Wasm backend replaces it by a=22.
- Expressions normalization: in this case, the comparison operations are normalized to its complementary operation, e.g. a > b is always replaced by  $b \le a$ .
- Redundant operation removal: expressions such as the multiplication of variables by  $a = b2^n$  are replaced by shift left operations a = b << n.

#### ■ 3.1.3 CROW instantiation

Let us illustrate how CROW works with the example code in Listing 3.3. The f function calculates the value of 2 \* x + x where x is the input for the function. CROW compiles this source code and generates the intermediate LLVM bitcode in the left most part of Listing 3.4. CROW potentially finds two integer returning instructions to look for variants, as the right-most part of Listing 3.4 shows.

```
Listing 3.3: C function that calculates the quantity 2x + x int f(int x) {

return 2 * x + x;
}
```

CROW, detects  $code_1$  and  $code_2$  as the enclosing boxes in the left most part of Listing 3.4 shows. CROW synthesizes 2+1 candidate code replacements for each code respectively as the green highlighted lines show in the right most parts of Listing 3.4. The baseline strategy of CROW is to generate variants out of all possible combinations of the candidate code replacements, *i.e.*, uses the power set of all candidate code replacements.

In the example, the power set is the cartesian product of the found candidate code replacements for each code block, including the original ones, as Listing 3.5 shows. The power set size results in 6 potential function variants. Yet, the generation stage would eventually generate 4 variants from the original program. CROW generated 4 statically different Wasm files, as Listing 3.6 illustrates. This gap between the potential and the actual number of variants is a consequence of the redundancy among the bitcode variants when composed into one. In other

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>We only illustrate three of the removed optimization for the sake of simplicity.

Listing 3.4: LLVM's intermediate representation program, its extracted instructions and replacement candidates. Gray highlighted lines represent original code, green for code replacements.

```
define i32 @f(i32) {
                             Replacement candidates for
                                                           Replacement candidates for
                                  code 1
                                                                code 2
2code 211.5103.5cm
1code 111.53.53.0cm
                             %2 = \text{mul nsw i32 } \%0.2
                                                           %3 = add nsw i32 %0.%2
%2 = mul nsw i32 %0,2
%3 = add nsw i32 %0.%2
                             %2 = add nsw i32 %0,%0
                                                           %3 = mul nsw %0, 3:i32
                             %2 = shl nsw i32 %0, 1:i32
ret i32 %3
define i32 @main() {
%1 = tail call i32 @f(i32
     10)
ret i32 %1
```

Listing 3.5: Candidate code replacements combination. Orange highlighted code illustrate replacement candidate overlapping.

```
%2 = mul nsw i32 %0,2

%3 = add nsw i32 %0,%2

%2 = add nsw i32 %0,%2

%3 = mul nsw %0, 3:i32

%2 = add nsw i32 %0,%0

%3 = add nsw i32 %0,%2

%2 = add nsw i32 %0,%2

%3 = mul nsw %0, 3:i32

%2 = shl nsw i32 %0, 1:i32

%3 = add nsw i32 %0, 3:i32
```

words, if the replaced code removes other code blocks, all possible combinations having it will be in the end the same program. In the example case, replacing code\_2 by mul nsw %0, 3, turns code\_1 into dead code, thus, later replacements generate the same program variants. The rightmost part of Listing 3.5 illustrates how for three different combinations, CROW produces the same variant. We call this phenomenon a code replacement overlapping.

One might think that a reasonable heuristic could be implemented to avoid such overlapping cases. Instead, we have found it easier and faster to generate the variants with the combination of the replacement and check their uniqueness after the program variant is compiled. This prevents us from having an expensive checking for overlapping inside the CROW code. Still, this phenomenon calls for later optimizations in future works.

#### ■ 3.1.4 Combining replacements

When we retarget Souper, to create variants, we recombine all code replacements, including those for which a constant inferring was performed. This allows us to

Listing 3.6: Wasm program variants generated from program Listing 3.3.

```
func $f (param i32) (result i32)
                                                func $f (param i32) (result i32)
  local.get 0
                                                   local.get 0
   i32.const 2
                                                   i32.const 1
   i32.mul
                                                   i32.shl
   local.get 0
                                                   local.get 0
   i32.add
                                                   i32.add
func $f (param i32) (result i32)
                                                func $f (param i32) (result i32)
   local.get 0
                                                   local.get 0
   local.get 0
                                                   i32.const 3
   i32.add
                                                   i32.mul
   local.get 0
   i32.add
```

create variants that are also better than the original program in terms of size and performance. Most of the Artificial Software Diversification works generate variants that are as performant or iller than the original program. By using a superdiversifier, we could be able to generate variants that are better, in terms of performance, than the original program. This will give the option to developers to decide between performance and diversification without sacrificing the former.

On the other hand, when Souper finds a replacement, it is applied to all equal instructions in the original LLVM binary. In our implementation, we apply the transformation only to the instruction for which it was found in the first place. For example, if we find a replacement that is suitable for N difference places in the original program, we generate N different programs by applying the transformation in only one place at a time. Notice that this strategy provides a combinatorial explosion of program variants as soon as the number of replacements increases.

#### ■ 3.2 MEWE: Multi-variant Execution for WebAssembly

This section describes MEWE [?]. MEWE synthesizes diversified function variants by using CROW. It then provides execution-path randomization in a Multivariant Execution (MVE). The tool generates application-level multivariant binaries without changing the operating system or Wasm runtime. MEWE creates an MVE by intermixing functions for which CROW generates variants, as the green squared tooling in Figure 3.1 shows. MEWE inlines function variants when appropriate, resulting in call stack diversification at runtime.

In Figure 3.3 we zoom MEWE from the blue highlighted square in Figure 3.1. MEWE takes the LLVM IR variants generated by CROW's diversifier. It then merges LLVM IR variants into a Wasm multivariant. In the figure, we highlight the two components of MEWE, *Multivariant Generation* and the *Mixer*. In the

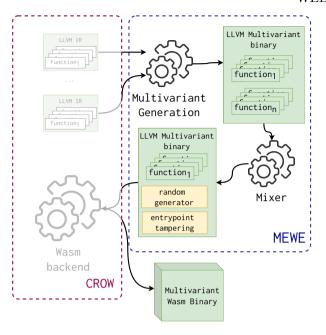


Figure 3.3: Overview of MEWE workflow. It takes as input an LLVM binary. It first generates a set of functionally equivalent variants for each function in the binary using CROW. Then, MEWE generates an LLVM multivariant binary composed of all the function variants. Finally, the Mixer includes the behavior in charge of selecting a variant when a function is invoked. Finally, the MEWE mixer composes the LLVM multivariant binary with a random number generation library and tampers the original application entrypoint. The final process produces a Wasm multivariant binary ready to be deployed.

Multivariant Generation process, MEWE merges the LLVM IR variants created by CROW and creates an LLVM multivariant binary. The merging of the variants intermixes the calling of function variants, allowing the execution path randomization.

The Mixer augments the LLVM multivariant binary with a random generator. The random generator is needed to perform the execution-path randomization. Also, The Mixer fixes the entrypoint in the multivariant binary. Finally, MEWE generates a standalone multivariant Wasm binary using the same custom Wasm LLVM backend from CROW. Once generated, the multivariant Wasm binary can be deployed to any Wasm engine.

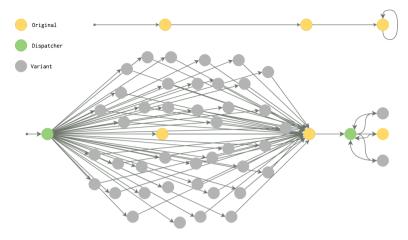


Figure 3.4: Example of two static call graphs. At the top, the original call graph, at the bottom, the multivariant call graph, which includes nodes that represent function variants (in gray), dispatchers (in green), and original functions (in yellow).

#### ■ 3.2.1 Multivariant generation

The key component of MEWE consists in combining the variants into a single binary. The goal is to support execution-path randomization at runtime. The core idea is to introduce one dispatcher function per original function with variants. A dispatcher function is a synthetic function in charge of choosing a variant at random when the original function is called. With the introduction of the dispatcher function, MEWE turns the original call graph into a multivariant call graph, defined as follows.

In Figure 3.4, we show the original static call graph for an original program (top of the figure), as well as the multivariant call graph generated with MEWE (bottom of the figure). The gray nodes represent function variants, the green nodes function dispatchers, and the yellow nodes are the original functions. The directed edges represent the possible calls. The original program includes three functions. MEWE generates 43 variants for the first function, none for the second, and three for the third. MEWE introduces two dispatcher nodes for the first and third functions. Each dispatcher is connected to the corresponding function variants to invoke one variant randomly at runtime.

In Listing 3.7, we illustrate the LLVM construction for the function dispatcher corresponding to the right most green node of Figure 3.4. It first calls the random generator, which returns a value used to invoke a specific function variant. We implement the dispatchers with a switch-case structure to avoid indirect calls that can be susceptible to speculative execution-based attacks [?]. The choice of a switch-case also avoids having multiple function definitions with the same signature, which could increase the attack surface in case the function signature

is vulnerable [?]. This also allows MEWE to inline function variants inside the dispatcher instead of defining them again.

```
define internal i32 @foo(i32 %0) {
   entry:
     %1 = call i32 @discriminate(i32 3)
     switch i32 %1, label %end [
      i32 0, label %case 43
       i32 1, label %case_44_
     1
   case_43_:
     %2 = call i32 @foo_43_(%0)
     ret i32 %2
   case 44 :
     %3 = <body of foo_44_ inlined>
     ret i32 %3
     %4 = call i32 @foo_original(%0)
     ret i32 %4
}
```

Listing 3.7: Dispatcher function embedded in the multivariant binary of the original function in the rightmost green node in Figure 3.4.

#### $\blacksquare$ 3.2.2 The Mixer

#### **TODO** Augment the description of the MIXER.

MEWE has four specific objectives: link the LLVM multivariant binary, inject a random generator, tamper the application's entrypoint, and merge all these components into a multivariant Wasm binary. We use the Rustc compiler³ to orchestrate the mixing. For the random generator, we rely on WASI's specification [?] for the random behavior of the dispatchers. However, its exact implementation is dependent on the platform on which the binary is deployed. The Mixer creates a new entrypoint for the binary called *entrypoint tampering*. It wraps the dispatcher for the entrypoint variants as a new function for the final Wasm binary and is declared as the application entrypoint.

#### ■ 3.3 Wasm-mutate

**TODO** Motivate **TODO** What happens with the other 30% of the binaries?

 $<sup>^3</sup>$ https://doc.rust-lang.org/rustc/what-is-rustc.html

3.4. DISCUSSION 17

#### ■ 3.3.1 Variants' generation

**TODO** The egraph thingy

#### ■ 3.4 Discussion

TODO Comparison of the approaches. TODO Add the cool table.

TODO This is contradictory to our binary solution. We use the superdiversifier idea of Jacob and colleagues to implement CROW because of two main reasons. First, the code replacements generated by this technique outperform diversification strategies based on handwritten rules. Concretely, we can control the quality of the generated codes. Besides, CROW always generates

equivalent programs because it is based on a solver to check for equivalence.

Second, there is a battle-tested superoptimizer for LLVM, Souper [?] This latter makes it feasible the construction of a generic LLVM superdiversifier.

## 04

## EXPLOITING SOFTWARE DIVERSIFICATION FOR WEBASSEMBLY

- 4.1 Offensive Software Diversification
- 4.1.1 Use case 1: Automatic testing and fuzzing of WebAssembly consumers

**TODO** We explain the CVE. Make the explanation around "indirect memory diversification"

- 4.1.2 Use case 2: WebAssembly malware evasion
  - TODO The malware evasion paper
- 4.2 Defensive Software Diversification
- 4.2.1 Use case 3: Multivariant execution at the Edge
  - **TODO** Disturbing of execution time. Go around the web timing attacks.
- 4.2.2 Use case 4: Speculative Side-channel protection
  - TODO Go around the last paper

## 05

## CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

- 5.1 Summary of technical contributions
- 5.2 Summary of empirical findings
- 5.3 Summary of empirical findings
- 5.4 Future Work

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# ${f Part~II}$ Included papers

22 REFERENCES

### SUPEROPTIMIZATION WEBASSEMBLY BYTECODE

OF

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Shrinish Donde, Jian Gu, Orestis Floros, Lucas Satabin, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus

Conference Companion of the 4th International Conference on Art, Science, and Engineering of Programming (Programming 2021), MoreVMs

https://doi.org/10.1145/3397537.3397567

## CROW: CODE DIVERSIFICATION FOR WEBASSEMBLY

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Orestis Floros, Oscar Vera-Pérez, Benoit Baudry, Martin Monperrus

Network and Distributed System Security Symposium (NDSS 2021), MADWeb

https://doi.org/10.14722/madweb.2021.23004

## MULTI-VARIANT EXECUTION AT THE EDGE

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Pierre Laperdrix, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry Conference on Computer and Communications Security (CCS 2022), Moving Target Defense (MTD)

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## WEBASSEMBLY DIVERSIFICATION FOR MALWARE EVASION

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WASM-MUTATE: FAST AND EFFECTIVE BINARY DIVERSIFICATION FOR WEBASSEMBLY

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Nick Fitzgerald, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry *Under revision* 

## SCALABLE COMPARISON OF JAVASCRIPT V8 BYTECODE TRACES

**Javier Cabrera-Arteaga**, Martin Monperrus, Benoit Baudry 11th ACM SIGPLAN International Workshop on Virtual Machines and Intermediate Languages (SPLASH 2019)

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